

POWER, POWERLESSNESS AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

POWER AND THE POINT OF CHRISTOLOGY

As a reflective enterprise, Christology is embedded in and draws light from an experienced relationship which is known from within before it is formulated in concepts. This primary, all-encompassing relationship is the presence, in the Spirit, of the Risen Christ through the Church to all the world and all of history, *and* the Spirit-borne movement within Church and world which is evoked and actuated by Christ's presence as response, taking the forms of worship of God through Christ and service to the neighbor. For Christian faith this presence and relationship is the single most influential force-field, so to speak, in all of history. History's final future will be the consummation of this relationship in which each past and ever-fleeing present will find acceptance, be radically converted and, transfigured, find a home with all else in the eschaton wrought by God's patient love.

But it is more interesting than this! The acceptance, conversion and future of our human lives is a matter of human freedom as well as God's in Christ. To the extent that people allow their lives and concerns and struggles to be drawn into the relationship, there is real hope that life-giving things can happen. Our convention this year is a sign of such allowance and hope, for we are endeavoring to find out what happens to our understanding of power—ours and the rest of the world's—when brought into this relationship with Christ. What light is shed on this fundamental dimension of human life when the story of Christ and our story are allowed to join in the Holy Spirit, primarily in worship and actual witness and service to our brothers and sisters, and secondarily—and here I am being secondary!—in the eucharistic reflection called theology?

Now as we move along in this convention it is apparent how important a clarification of terms is. In each address and each seminar we've heard our basic terms—power and powerlessness—defined so that they might become tools for faithful thought. Now it's my turn!

I take power and powerlessness to be dimensions of actual relationship whether between individuals, between groups, or between an individual and a group, or even within an individual person. Power is being exercised whenever A affects B in some significant way and in a manner which is prior to or apart from B's exercise of freedom. The influence being exerted can be in either the real or apparent interests of A or B or both. Power, therefore, is the influence exerted by an individual or a group on another or others in the very being-situated of the affected group or person. The ways this can happen are myriad: presence, confrontation, indoctrination, praxis, suffering, unconscious interactions, and so on. Powerlessness would be the inability, for reasons within or without a person or group, to exercise influence on the other prior to or apart from their freedom. May I add that I do not think that power is a zero-sum reality, nor is it an intrinsic quality of persons or groups. It shares in the complexity of relationships.

Authority, on the other hand, characterizes a relationship when B allows A to exert influence on B, because B recognizes the goodness of this influence in terms of B's own values. Following Steven Lukes, I would define coercion as the securing of compliance through threat of sanctions; force as the achieving of one's objectives in the face of B's non-compliance by stripping B of the choice between compliance and non-compliance.¹ Manipulation brings about compliance in the absence of recognition on the complier's part either of the source or the exact nature of the demand upon him or her or the group.

In his social-theoretical treatment of the concept of power, Lukes admits that each definition is an essentially contested concept. Agreed. But let this be the mapping of the semantic territory for our purposes here, no matter how basic it may seem.

Let me now offer some preliminary reflections on power and powerlessness as so defined. In a Christian framework, powerlessness is an evil thing, the deprivation or privation of something which ought to be present. Not to be able to have any effect on one's own or another's situation is contradictory to what God's creation is all about. Power in some mode or other is part of God's creation, and while it may be true, as Rahner avers in his superb article on power, that only in a world lacking the gift of integrity can influence be exerted on another person or group apart from their freedom, still power is not simply, of itself, evil.² But it is not neutral either. Power, the actual influencing of others' situations prior to or apart from their actual exercise of freedom, can be valued for its own sake, or for the good it does the exerciser alone, or it can be a step on the way to a relationship other than itself: power as end and power as means.

From another angle, one can see a fundamental instability in the power dimension of a relationship. The more the powerful try to expand their power, the more they seek from those affected a validation and consent to that exercise of power and the identity shaped by that exercise. The expansion of power deepens its dependency as the "ante" is raised by the powerful. In such a situation the weak have powers, as Elizabeth Janeway reminds us.³

But now let us pass on to the story of Jesus and our story, as a narrative of power and powerlessness.

II. THE STORY OF JESUS

The primary place where the story of Jesus makes its point is in the midst of public worship when proclaimed *viva voce* from faith to faith. Here the story is alive as the story of Jesus' presence and identity gathering up ours in the Holy Spirit. Frans Jozef van Beeck has done a masterful job reminding us of this primary *locus communis*—place of encounter—where the story makes its sense.⁴ Resurrection, that is, the presence of Christ in the Spirit, is the horizon of the worshipping and narrating as direct, responsive activities, and there is

¹*Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 17f.

²*Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, translated by Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 393.

³*Powers of the Weak* (New York: Morrow, 1981). Janeway's book is a very instructive exploration of the powers of women in patriarchal culture. She is consistent in her treatment of power as a process of interaction among human beings (p.11).

⁴*Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 123–25.

plenty of room for both the central event, the Pasch of the Lord, and the less than definitive, the provisional reality of Jesus' ministry and our own uncompleted lives. Let's look at the ministry, cross and Easter as a story shedding light on power and powerlessness. The Synoptics, especially Mark, and Paul will be our principal, although not exclusive, guides.

A. Jesus' Ministry

Jesus of Nazareth lived his life and ministry grounded in God's initiative in his life and under the sway of the Holy Spirit. The initiative is God's and in this sense there is a dimension of power to the relationship between them. God qualifies Jesus' life, makes a total difference in his life, prior to Jesus' human response. On the other hand, this powerful presence seeks free acceptance and free return in mutual relationship. The divine power seeks to become something else: authority evoking and sustaining a Son's commitment.

There is a pattern to this relationship between Jesus and God which finds expression in one way or another in most contemporary Christologies. I would put it this way. Jesus received, in the communication of divine life and human life, the pure gift of God's unconditional acceptance of him, a fundamental, powerful yes to his being.⁵ This acceptance, coming from the unmanipulable divine One is his life, worked in Jesus a sense of his own intrinsic acceptability which is, itself, constantly free gift made to him.⁶ The acceptance and acceptability received flowered into a free acceptance of the real God, of himself and of those who were fellow recipients, in their own way, of this gift. The dynamism begun by God and conspired with by Jesus allowed all of Jesus' reality to be continually drawn toward, turned toward both Abba and his sisters and brothers. Disciple of Abba, he lived in community of life with God and his own people, a community which begot mission.

Being accepted, converted, claimed in discipleship and community and sent forth on mission are all actions of God-Abba upon Jesus and they ground the accepting, converting, claiming and serving which proceed from Jesus as responsive complicity with the divine Other. This is not power, but a deep, life-giving congruence of self-offer on God's part and free acceptance and obedience on Jesus' part.

Within this matrix of acceptance offered and responsively enacted, Jesus is able (1) to be a somebody; (2) to develop a healthy mistrust, and (3) to enter into and foster new community as an alternative to "normal living."

Grounded and impelled by God's love, Jesus is a somebody. Amid his fellow Israelites he is a presence to be contended with. He is an individual, focussed, a center who radiates life and influence, *exousia* and dynamis. The relationship with Abba is a climate of mutual trust within which Jesus can arise as a person who is himself and no other. There is time and room for him to claim his gifts, to try them out, to feel his own identity both as his own and as gift to others. This identity and its active ownership is presence as power,

⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), ch. 2 and 3.

⁶Intrinsic acceptability as gift is a basic component of a Roman Catholic theology of creation within a theology of justification and divinization. See Van Breeck's discussion of Paul Tillich in *Christ Proclaimed*, pp. 202-17.

which, simply through its offer of self and involvement in others' lives, changes the horizon and feel of their identities and worlds.

The trust which is Jesus' environment, which comes from those who love him and the God who speaks through them and as more than their voice, permits Jesus, as he matures, to develop a healthy mistrust of "normal living," of the radically off-centered existence which people take for granted, where death-dealing arrangements, conscious and unconscious, dictate the terms of people's lives.⁷ His ministry is that of someone who is free to disidentify himself vis-a-vis the destructive powers at work in his society. Jesus withholds himself where others give themselves. Out of deep complicity with the God of his life and the creaturely reality which is constantly God's gift and as such Jesus' reality, Jesus can refuse to be accomplice to the powers of darkness masked in normalcy.

Thirdly, Jesus fosters and willingly enters into community with disciples he chooses with an authority like Yahweh's.⁸ The autonomy which is his is not the opposite of shared life but the fruit of it, and this life shared with Abba finds both expression and support in his bond with his disciples. Together they form a minority movement—another one in the long history of the Chosen People—seeking to witness to the consolation being visited upon desiccated and desolate Israel.

In his relationship to others there are strategy and tactics. Presenting himself to others, he gives them the opportunity to be encountered by the Kingdom. Apart from their freedom, and frequently in conflict with the concrete shape of their freedom, Jesus presents the Kingdom. This is power, the power of teaching, of wonder-working, which seeks acceptance and complicity from the other.

The guilt-ridden, the possessed, the seriously ill, the poor of the land, women, all are locked in a bind which is the result of religio-cultural injustice in each case, and in some, this injustice done to them is blended with a dark complicity on the victims' part. These people are trapped in a web of false dependency; they are named by their culture and imprisoned by that naming. In wrestling with the demons, Jesus the exorcist engages in a contest of naming and being named, and draws strength from a source other than some private core of himself. He receives public sinners at table under the sign of the Kingdom in order to set in motion a dynamic which can lead to acceptance, forgiveness, relationship and new, life-giving autonomy. He cracks, or tries to crack, the hard shell of guilt and lethal dependency by prayer, exorcism, explosive parables, meals shared, hoping that the hard heart of guilt-riddenness might become the broken heart vulnerable to God's mercy and its own gifted creatureliness.

⁷Sebastian Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger* (New York: Seabury, 1981): "Nevertheless, the very fact that the thought of God is not enough for us as moral sensitizer shows that 'the thought of God' is incredibly weak in us, corresponding hardly at all to the flaming and all consuming reality. And this indeed is sin. . . . Sin is the unreality of God. Sin is the unreality of the real to the unreal. Sin is the unreality of life other than the small portion of it that one calls one's own and builds into immobility" (p.33). On the power of healthy disbelief or mistrust, see Janeway, *Powers of the Weak*, ch. 11.

⁸See Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, translated by James Greig (New York: Crossroads, 1981), p. 87.

The self-righteous, the power-types as recognized in that society, have an intactness about them which is in its own way lethal. They are isolated in webs of rationalization and defense, and as Sebastian Moore puts it, they need to be promoted to being broken sinners if they are to begin to be open to the adventure of covenantal relationship.⁹ They are really tough to get at. They have taken the measure of God and flesh and know exactly where they stand and where their interests lie. The grace of yesterday has become the fortress of today, the fortress of prestige, money, group solidarity and power.¹⁰ In tackling these interests, Jesus' tactics are varied: he tries to trap them into honest self-knowledge through parables; he lovingly lambasts them; he speaks the woes of prophetic grief and denunciation to stimulate some new life in these "religious stiff" who don't know they are dead, they're so busy defending themselves from a new gift.¹¹ The autonomous individual and group which prizes autonomy above all else, is the object of Jesus' tactics. It seems as though Jesus recognized that guilt and "goodness" are not the ultimate issue, but the deadly isolation and dependency which can prevent guilt and goodness from becoming the stuff of life-giving identity fostered by gracious relationship.

The dynamic set in motion by Jesus bears on individual persons and their worlds. The shared assumptions which cemented the lives of publicans, Pharisees, Sadducees, the poor, women, provided webs of plausibility which trapped both those who profited from the system and those done in by it. Jesus moved in on these shared assumptions and upended them at strategic points to let in the new life of God's compassionate love and hunger for justice.¹² Oppression from without, internalized from within, could begin to shift, thanks to his intervention, into a process of becoming subjects in a new web, a new community. To be sure, the process of moving from being objects to subjects meant the paying of costs of another kind than those exacted by the oppressors within and without. The cost of responsibility assumed, in relation to self and to others, is a great one indeed, but this is the wages of life claimed and enacted.

The "haves" were challenged to discover the true base of their identity, not in the expansion and simple maintenance of power, but in the gift of creation and Kingdom which was offered to them from God's future and theirs. Recognizing that secret, and trusting anew in that grace from the Other, they could begin to appreciate that power is given to the creature so that a space might be cleared for the mutual recognition of brothers and sisters in bonds of compassion and reciprocal empowerment.

Thus we see in the ministry of Jesus the power of presence and praxis, the strategy of love which is in turn indignant, grieving, rejoicing, combative and compassionate, so that the powerful and the weak might return to being creatures, be freed of their dark complicities and move forward into the future wrought by God.

But—the resistance to all these tactics becomes total.

⁹Moore, *The Crucified Jesus*, pp. 100f.

¹⁰See Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), Part III.

¹¹See Walter Brueggeman, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

¹²In this sense, Jesus ministered to the social structures of his time. See my "Power and Parable in Jesus' Ministry" in *Above Every Name: The Lordship of Christ and Social Structures* (New York: Paulist, 1980), pp. 83–104.

B. The Cross

As Jesus dies on the cross with a shriek and with a cry of abandonment on his lips, he is not the transmitter of particular beneficial effects, nor is he simply the object of the multiple violent actions being done to him. Stripped of all accustomed resources, especially his habitual Abba experience, yet saying not a word which excludes, displaces, or judges his crucifiers from a higher vantage point, Jesus dies one with the dark exercise of power being done on him and in him.¹³ With Urs von Balthasar we must say that he dies not only one with the sinners, the crucifiers and schemers and traitorous disciples, but one with their sinning, one with the destroying and degrading act,¹⁴ yet not conspiring—so Easter declares—in the slightest way, either self-righteously or masochistically, with their sin. Jesus becomes, in gracious freedom, the body of their sin, sinning's body; for now sin has gone public in a total way, in that monstrous act of projection and displacement which takes out on Jesus the self-hatred and absolutized fear which always seem to want to establish their body in another.¹⁵

It has been suggested that Jesus did not die with a clean conscience and the point is well made. But that does not mean that he died with a dirty conscience or a hopelessly confused one. It's just that, theologically speaking, the language of "conscience" does not seem to fit here; it can't find an interstice here in the free oneness of Jesus with sinners and their sinning. A conscience which excluded the Jews, the Gentiles and the followers of Jesus from community of life with Jesus and their God would, for the umpteenth time, have made the move which keeps the old world going: the willful isolation or destructive dependency and identification which does in humankind while supplying, again and again, so much of its social cement.¹⁶

The sin of the crucifiers terminates as such in the sinners themselves but it embodies itself in Jesus' objective condition, as one physically and psychologically violated. I want to say spiritually violated as well, but we must be careful

¹³I am viewing the "last words" of Luke and John as expressing additional dimensions of the import of Jesus' death but as not essentially diluting the cry of abandonment in the Marcan account which Matthew follows.

¹⁴"Mysterium Paschale" in *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, Vol. III/2, edited by Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln, Zürich, Cologne: Benziger, 1969) pp. 160f., 183 and esp. 223. Von Balthasar shows how a Roman Catholic Christology and soteriology must make Jesus' Godforsakenness on the cross central in its reflections, without subscribing to all aspects of a Reformed or Lutheran view of the relation between creation and grace. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

¹⁵Sebastian Moore transposes much of Anselmian, Lutheran and Reformed formulations of the Cross into a graced dynamic of psychological appropriation, which is a creative and basically faithful retrieval of much inherited conceptuality which has lost significance for contemporary Christians. Cf. Edouard Pousset, S. J.: "For one who arrives at this meaning of sin, at this recognition of Christ made sin in him, it is not so much the *representation* of Christ on the cross that puts him in touch with his Creator and Lord. Rather, it is his sin itself—his meager reality, reality for him here—that is from now on Christ; sin is the revelation of Christ. On this level of truth, the retreatant no longer *passes* from his sins to representations (especially the representation of Christ on the cross) which tell him their meaning. He is within the correlation sin/Christ-made-sin, his soul is enlivened by this very correlation," *Life in Faith and Freedom: An Essay Presenting Gaston Fessard's Analysis of the Dialectic of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Eugene L. Donahue (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), p. 55.

¹⁶It is crucial to recognize that the point being made here is a theological one and not an empirical psychological assertion about Jesus on the cross.

here. To omit saying it can imply that there was some clean, well-lighted place in Jesus which went "untouched." There was, I suggest, no special inflexibility in Jesus, no core of being which, with spiritual strength, bent sin back on the sinners. His "move," his reality toward them, is neither conquest nor counterstroke.

It is indeed Easter which illumines the depth and breadth of what is occurring on the cross; it reveals to faith that the crucified Jesus is the fully actualized meeting within history (yet moving into complete eschatological life) of authentic humanity, the real God, and the dark power of sin operating in and through the guilty yet banal actions and desertions of sinners. Jesus on the cross is the tent of meeting, the *mysterion* designed by God in the depths of Trinitarian life. Nothing of God, humankind and sin is left out. There is no repression of divine indignation and divine mercy, of human creatureliness or of the dark power of sin. God's hatred of sin, indignation at the self-destructiveness of sinners, and covenantal mercy, meet all that the world has to offer in the way of authentic creatureliness—actual in Jesus and potential in sinners—and in the way of sin.¹⁷ All this is so because of who Jesus is, and not because of the explicit intentionality of the sinners involved. The completeness of the meeting is traceable to the God who hands Jesus over, thus handing God's self over, and traceable to the freedom of Jesus which conspired so obediently with that *paradosis*.¹⁸

The power of sin operates through the violent actions of the sinners involved. This mythic language needs to be used with care, but it is, I think, unavoidable. The cross is the documentation of sin, its "dark sacrament." To be sure, on one level it is just another torture session and execution like others in Palestine and the *Pax Romana*, like pogroms in the Middle Ages, like the obscenities of Auschwitz and Cambodia, like the violence in El Salvador and American ghettos and suburbs. The kind of execution involved suggests that the real intent is not simply to dispatch someone from this life, but to try to convince the victim that the verdict regarding one's sub-humanity is perfectly correct.¹⁹ The executioners seek the complicity of the victim whether by a yes to the verdict or by inciting a returning hatred for hatred. Dark power seeks dark acquiescence or dark imitation. Seeking to be absolute, the crucifying power seeks to corrupt absolutely, leaving no one outside its field of force.

Jesus' presence and activity in his ministry was provocative, and where it failed to gentle self-righteousness and guilt-riddenness, it apparently resulted in the arousal of yet deeper sin. The more isolated sin becomes, the more removed from God's love, the more "power" it has, a fraudulent, parasitic power which comes from its hiddenness. The cross is the hour of sin's power, but in

¹⁷Hatred of sin, indignation or wrath directed at what loved sinners are doing to themselves, and mercy for the sake of covenant are three dimensions of God's love. To deny any one of them is to make God's love unreal or, better, "unrealistic." They are reconcilable ultimately not through a logical mediation of their differences, but in the disciple's experience of the real God in Christ in relation to the God projected by the sinful self. The polarities of the hateful, wrathful and merciful God are "polarities to be negotiated in a process of religious conversion" (William P. Loewe).

¹⁸God's handing over of Jesus to sinners makes sense only when the Trinitarian nature of this handing over is recognized along with Jesus' free obedience to the Father for the sake of sinners. See Urs von Balthasar, "Mysterium Paschale," p. 202.

¹⁹See Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

full meeting: not a logical paradox, but a situation consummate in its possibilities. It is utter violence, fully indignant judgment and completely merciful act, all in one event. On the cross Jesus leaves all praxis behind, not by becoming simple object-victim, but by being stripped down to being simply himself for them, for their sakes.

How is this possible? How is it that Jesus can be this completely substantial, *homoousios* with sinners? The tradition has maintained that it is on the basis of Jesus' human reality's divine relationship to Abba in the Holy Spirit. Jesus offers the crucifiers himself, his identity for them and thus the God who grounds that identity. I think Frans Jozef van Beeck's analysis of representation in *Christ Proclaimed* is an excellent help here. Jesus, on the cross, is representatively one, without displacement, with God, the origin of his steadfast love in dereliction; he is representatively one with the authentic humanity of the crucifiers and deserting disciples, that dearest freshness which they are crucifying morally and spiritually; and he is representatively one with their identity as crucifiers by bearing, and so manifesting back to themselves, the violence of their sin that is terminating as formal sin, second death, in them, and not in Jesus.²⁰ *Ecce homo*, indeed! Behold how God, the truly human, and the sinners and their sin look when completely out in the open in completely acutualized mutual encounter. In relation to the cross, the *mysterion*, the plan of God from all eternity, has all the marks of a divine set-up, a divine sting!

Though rich he became poor; though God's perfect dialogue partner as the sinless, authentic human, he did not take advantage of this condition but emptied himself, living out the existence of a slave; although he appeared to others to be just like them, what he actually was doing was humbling himself, becoming obedient even unto death a cross.²¹ In other words, although in full mutual relationship with God and in full relationship with creation as it comes from God, Jesus, with a gracious, hidden freedom, united himself with the world's rejection of life-giving relationship and of creaturely autonomy out of obedience to God, becoming freely the utterly isolated one and fatally dependent one: the slave. In relation to the God- and self-forsaking, Jesus becomes, in obedience, the Godforsaken, for their sakes.

Jesus becomes victim, but not object-victim; he is himself for them. This, I submit, is not powerlessness. It is power, but the power of faithful presence, involving no reserves of autonomous strength. As Moore puts it, it is *the* response to the heart's deepest longing: to be someone for the other. But it looks, for all the world, like the very powerlessness the world has always hated and feared.

C. Easter

It is very difficult for us to move from talk of Good Friday to a reflection on Easter without making it seem like a simple transition, a simple removal of wraps which hitherto cloaked the real significance of the cross. But between the Godforsakenness, *peirasmós* and desolation of Good Friday and the blessing of Easter there is a hiatus, an incommensurability which the human mind, how-

²⁰*Christ Proclaimed*, pp. 412-16.

²¹Following Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Christological Anthropology in Phil II, 6-11," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976), 25-50.

ever dialectical in its operation, cannot bridge. The only bridge is the faithful love of God which dynamically unites the two incommensurables in fashioning the Son and Servant as both the Godforsaken one and the faithful one.²²

Jesus, alive in the Spirit, presents himself to the disciples. This witness of Jesus to himself, to the Father and to the disciples' own authentic yet sinned-against identity is, I suggest, characterized in three ways: (1) it is as underivable from one's unconscious and consciousness as is the goal of human transcendence; (2) the presence of Jesus does not compel consent, but commands it on the level on which only the Holy Mystery can command; (3) it initiates a process of acceptance, conversion of goodness and guilt into the stuff of discipleship in community unto witness and service of others; this process is in continuity with the pre-Easter ministry but underivable from it as well, because the Crucified and Living One initiates the process now. All of sin has had its hour and, as definitive power, has exhausted itself on Jesus. The offer and acceptance of God's love to and in and through human history is communicated by Jesus in his self-presentation in a way which breaks out of all cycles, all rhythms of the past. The new and final aeon is inaugurated, the last Adam, the new humanity.

Both Edward Schillebeeckx and Sebastian Moore put a great deal of weight on the disciples' conversion in the Easter experience.²³ For Moore it is essential that the presence of Jesus to the disciples after Jesus' death be a presence which gives them what Jesus' death deprived them of: God, Kingdom, Christ-hope, faith, love, and Jesus, for all of these were, for the disciples, inextricably bound up with each other. The level of this meeting is not primarily that of appearance, of auditory and visual experiences, although they have their role to play. The level of meeting, I would suggest (and Moore is the one who has helped me see this connection), is the level where only can occur what Ignatius of Loyola called consolation without preceding cause, the level so central to an Ignatian theologian such as Karl Rahner, the level of human transcendence as such. It is this level which is the place of combat of sin and grace, and it is here that Jesus' death evacuates, empties the disciples of God and grace. In the Easter experience, Jesus is experienced as consolation without preceding cause precisely where the disciples experienced the death of God in the death of Jesus.²⁴

Easter is the reversal of the Godforsakenness of the cross. Both despite and because of Good Friday, Easter is able to occur. The power of God is manifest here, where the dead rise and that which was not was made to be. The body of sin, excommunication and oppression is made the body of glory,

²²See Urs von Balthasar, "Mysterium Paschale," p. 209.

²³Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, translated by Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 380-97. Sebastian Moore, *The Fire and the Rose Are One* (New York: Seabury, 1980), p. 142, and "Experiencing the Resurrection," *Commonweal* 109 (1982), 47-49.

²⁴The extraordinary character of this experience consists in *this Jesus*, alive in the Spirit, being consolation without preceding cause. On the level of transcendence as such Jesus is experienced as communicating God's life to the disciples. This is the place where sin had "eliminated" God in killing Jesus on the cross: in the disciples' human transcendence. On the notion of consolation without preceding cause, see Karl Rahner, "The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius of Loyola" in *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, translated by W. J. O'Hare (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), pp. 84-170.

koinonia and freedom. In both cases, Jesus is thoroughly bound up with his disciples and they with him.

In and through the Crucified Jesus, God divests God's self of power as the ego envies it, mimics it, and fears it. Divested of God and of Jesus, the disciples receive the presence of the living Jesus as the presence of the one who, having done and suffered all in relation to all (*satisfactio*), can now present himself to their deepest freedom as the eschatologically persuasive one (*revelatio*). The persuasiveness is rooted in the *satisfactio*. In Jesus God does everything, even to becoming an exposed jugular, to convince those either lusting for power or shirking responsibility to relax and receive gift as the basis for all human power and responsibility.

III. DISCIPLESHIP

In the ministry of Jesus the power of God, the Holy Spirit, held sway over Jesus and was the determining divine force, so to speak, in his activities and indeed, in his entire historical identity. In the narrative patterns of the gospels, including Luke's, the Spirit seems to be rather impersonal, or nonpersonal, the anonymous, but supremely influential matrix or milieu of Jesus' life and mission. Jesus is the focus, the individual who lives out of that matrix and milieu, and it is Jesus' presence which people have to contend with and open themselves to, or reject. It is as though the followers of Jesus, recalling the story, want to stay faithful to an early and central impression made upon them, or those who began the Jesus-tradition: Jesus, the other than themselves, the individual, is the consolation of Israel, and it is in meeting Jesus that they touched and were touched by the consolation, that renewed relationship of openness and accessibility between God and God's people, which, once again, has arisen in Israel.

But for Paul, for whom the paschal event inaugurates the new aeon, the end of all cycles of consolation, rejection and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal, or nonpersonal power, but is stamped, imprinted, personalized by the Crucified and Risen One.²⁵ Not only that, but the Spirit is not now the impeller of Jesus, the agent behind Jesus, the matrix and milieu of Jesus the individual, the other, but the Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, the bond of family kinship, the matrix of the Lord with the baptized, the principle of unity of the *soma pneumatikon*, with the person-building and community-building power of, not an anonymous divine agency, but a presence which has the features of Jesus and the features of the sons and daughters who receive their identity from their dependency on Jesus the Lord.²⁶ If it is only in the Holy Spirit that people can say, "Jesus is Lord," that is because it is the Spirit which conforms them to the pattern of death and life of Jesus by bringing about a life-giving dependence on the Christ.

To call the Holy Spirit the power of God, God as power, it is essential that the Spirit is acknowledged as having the features which Jesus, the sender of the Spirit, gives to the Spirit. The expansiveness and inclusiveness, transcendence

²⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, pp. 318–26.

²⁶The Spirit takes on the features of the whole Christ, not because of indigence but because of the Spirit's transcendence-in-immanence. The Spirit is content to lead all to the Father by leading all to Jesus and the neighbor in need.

and immanence of the Spirit in the life of the Church and the life of the world is channeled through the narrow door of the double reversal of Cross and Easter. The Spirit is not the human ego writ larger and larger; it is not power as the ego seeks it, expands it, maintains it and fears it. The Spirit, as matrix and milieu of those bound up with Christ, empowers them to the *imitatio Christi*. That *imitatio* involves all the dynamics of Jesus' identity, but now shared in by others, who, free *not* to be Jesus, can live out their own identity within the nourishing community, in dependence on Christ. They can claim their gifts and learn to name their world, out of the trust granted by that Spirit. They are able to disengage from the old aeon, even while this is provocative of opposition from the old. The Spirit can give the freedom to plan, and strategize, and use power and seek power for justice' sake, all the while distinguishing herself from those strategies and uses of power. The Spirit teaches the disciples how to rejoice in the "already" of the Kingdom and to grieve, be indignant and suffer the burden of the "not yet," in themselves and in the Church and world. The Spirit teaches the disciples how to remember what the present time can seduce one into forgetting, the pain and death and the victims of the past, and the consolation that was there, back then, however much threatened.

The Spirit, we are told, makes all thing new. How does the Spirit transform; what does transformation mean in Spirit-terms? Again, the ministry, the cross and Easter are the form, the determining elements. The ministry of Jesus involved transient actions of Jesus allied with the Father in the Spirit. The effects of Jesus' exercise of power were real and to a great extent transient. After all, the people Jesus cured eventually died, his teaching was often misunderstood, and he was not able to control what happened to his initiatives once they left his hands. The Spirit was at work in all this in ways invisible. But the opposition mounted and Jesus was nailed to a cross. His weakness, helplessness and vulnerability were there for all to see. The Spirit did not transform Jesus' weakness into strength, Jesus' inabilities at the time into abilities. The Spirit united Jesus to the Father and brought about Jesus' conspiracy with that unity, and on that basis Jesus was able to be himself for God and the crucifiers. The Spirit does not take away limitation or weakness, but unites herself with it, that God's love might continue to construct a new, eschatological body from history.

The Spirit is thus about the very thing Jesus was about: life-giving relationship as such. Power is a name for the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit at work in the disciples in a converted sense, when the disciples experience the Spirit working through their talents and their weakness and suffering. Their weakness and suffering are not necessarily turned into strength, but the Spirit unites herself to them.²⁷ The Kingdom arrives, *ad-veniens*, through paschal reversal of the stuff of history from the future, and not by historical accumulation from out of the past.

It is the Spirit which can turn personal depression and social oppression into personal and social suffering, in a precise sense of the word "suffering." Depression and oppression are weights bearing down on persons or groups functioning as objects who have somehow internalized and ratified the pain in a way which is inert and prospectless. A new element must enter the scene as gift

²⁷See Dunn on the Pauline understanding of charism: *Jesus and the Spirit*, pp. 253-58.

to awaken the long lost sense of dignity, dearest freshness, that was buried to consciousness. Once the person or group is able to appropriate that sense, a shift can occur, a shift from being object to being subject, carrier of the pain and weight. The ego is dethroned as lord and ruler—a deadly sovereignty which took the form of absolute demand or absolute flight—and the person and the group begin to pay the life-giving costs of responsiveness and responsibility, which in turn opens up a space for practical strategizing to change the external situation wherever possible. Only suffering in this sense is meaningful, future-oriented, and dynamic.²⁸ The sufferings of the Church which fill up what is lacking to Christ's are this kind. All genuine emancipation and redemption involve this kind of suffering. In the Spirit, the community of disciples can share in Christ's power of presence to the world he loves, the world that is already his—and not yet.

BRIAN O. MCDERMOTT, S.J.
Weston School of Theology

²⁸I am indebted to an unpublished essay by Helen Luke for these reflections.